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During her postings in Togo and Mali, UNV Programme Officer Sonia Rigaud (France), has successfully found helpful translators through UNV's Online Volunteer service. (UNV 2011)

From a distance or on the ground: volunteers making a difference in Togo

Sometimes, UN Volunteers and UN online volunteers work hand in hand. As a UNV Programme Manager in Togo, Sonia Rigaud (France) called on Elise Gourier, a French translator living Switzerland, to translate material through UNV's Online Volunteering service.

In addition to the 8,000 UN Volunteers that the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme mobilizes every year, around 10,000 UN online volunteers provide their support over the Internet to organizations working on the ground. Via UNV's Online Volunteering service, they carry out assignments for organizations to help developing countries eradicate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They support democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and promote environmentally sustainable development. Sometimes, UN Volunteers and UN online volunteers work hand in hand, like Sonia Rigaud (France) and Elise Gourier. As the UNV Programme Officer in Togo, Sonia's role was to manage the UNV country programme there. In October 2009, she helped the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Togo (where she was assigned) find an online volunteer to translate a brochure on the MDGs into French, the country's official language. This is how she met Elise, a French national living in Switzerland, who was working on her PhD in Finance at that time. "Not having finished my studies, I aimed to complete them whilst making my contribution to these projects promoting development and peace," Elise said, explaining her motivation to become an online volunteer. "Thanks to this translation work I got to know Sonia, the UNV representative in Togo. She was always available and in a good mood, and helped me a lot in familiarizing myself with the specific vocabulary associated with UN action." And Sonia says: "I found this first support to be so fruitful and successful that I immediately requested Elise's help again. Whether for a translation from French to English or English to

French, she always made herself available to help us. Since then, Elise and Sonia have collaborated on various translations, including working papers, project concepts, communication materials, reports and a welcome booklet for new UN Volunteers. Each translation task has been a rewarding experience for me, both intellectually and personally. This work has opened my eyes to a world that is completely different to the one which surrounds me; a world that I hear of occasionally, but which is so easy to forget about living in a privileged country. These two years of collaboration have provided me with a lot in terms of my personal plans, and have given me the opportunity to get to know Sonia better, who by her kindness has made the work even more enjoyable to do, Elise says. To Elise, the advantages of online volunteering are obvious: Thanks to online volunteering, everyone can participate in their own way, giving some of their time to an action which will have a real effect as long as enough people and governments are involved, and combine their efforts. Beyond the actual work that is done, I think that this type of volunteering can help to raise peoples curiosity, and to improve awareness of what is going on in the world, she says. Elise is very professional and always available and willing to help, so I can't help but be enthusiastic about our work together and recommend the Online Volunteering service, which is of great benefit to us, says Sonia, who recently moved to Mali, where she will continue to serve as a UNV Programme Officer. Elise will accompany her, remotely: I am looking forward to the idea of learning more about Mali through our future collaborations.

Many thanks to UN online Volunteer Miriam Ford for translating the original UNV Online Volunteering service newsletter story from French.

Global

Sustainable Development Goal: